00085567

910.45
Cha Ita
85567

THE
ASIATIC SOCIETY OF BOMBAY
TOWN HALL, BOMBAY-400 023.

Digitized with financial assistance from
Hermès India
a project facilitated by the Rotary Club of Bombay

on 10 August, 2018

Isis and Thamesis

Isis and Thamesis

Hours on the River from Oxford to Henley

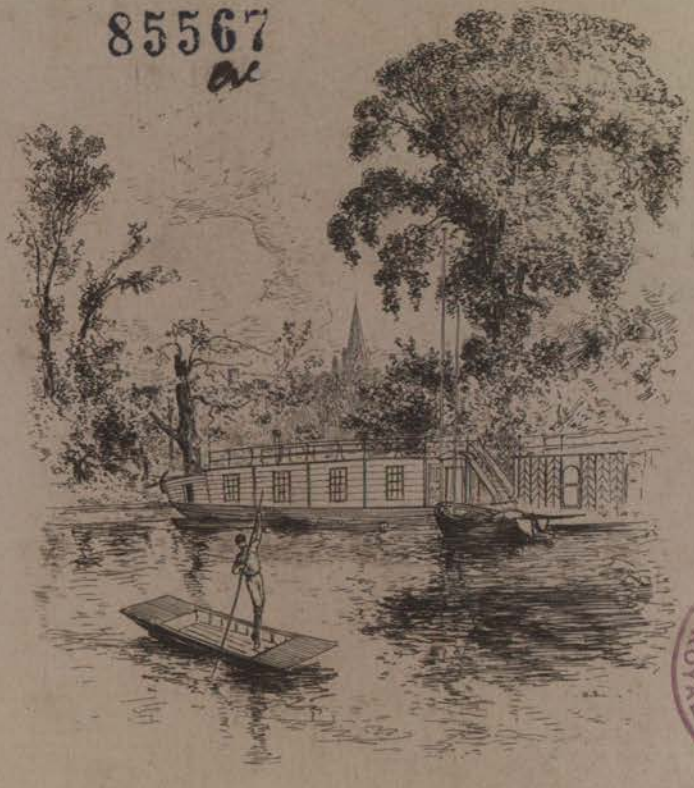
By

Alfred J. Church M.A.

Lincoln Coll. Oxford

Z.a.27

85567
ac

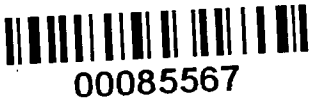


LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY.

London

Seeley & Co. 46, 47, & 48, Essex Street, Strand

1886


00085567

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
GODSTOW	2
BARGES AT BINSEY	4
THE START FROM IFFLEY	10
THE EIGHTS FROM FOLLY BRIDGE	12
IFFLEY	18
ABINGDON	24
DORCHESTER	28
GORING	34
STREATLEY	38
PANGBOURNE	44
MAPLEDURHAM	48
HENLEY REGATTA	60

VIGNETTES

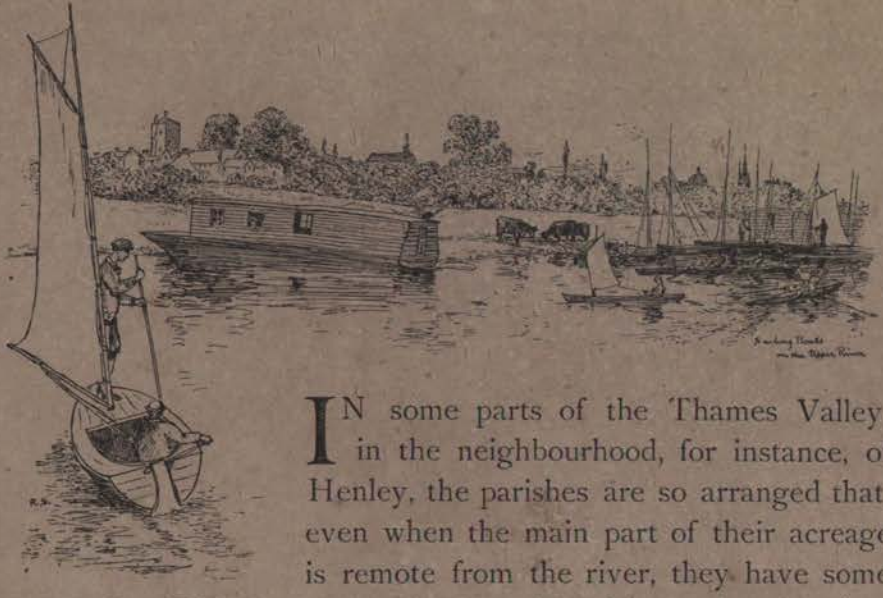
	PAGE
Sailing Boats on the Upper River	1
Oxford from Binsey	5
Ferry on the Oxford Canal	6
Isis and Oxford Canal	7
In the Garden of Worcester Coll.	8
The Cherwell—A Summer Afternoon	9
O. U. B. Clubhouse	11
Folly Bridge, Oxford.	14
Practising for Henley	17
Oxford from Iffley	19
Nuneham	20
Salter's Barge	22
Sutton Courtney	23
Clifton Hampden	26
The Thames at Shillingford	27
Shillingford Bridge	27
Isis	29
St. Leonard's, Wallingford	31
View from Streatley Hill	32
Goring Mill	33
Basildon Ferry	35
Basildon	36
Landing Place, near Coomb Lodge	39
Above Pangbourne	43
Hardwick House	45
The Swan, Pangbourne	46
The Last of the Poplars	52
The Poplars in 1872	57
Hambleden Mill	58
Henley Bridge	62
Regatta Island	64
Before the Storm	64
Thamesis	65

THE heads of Isis and Thamesis adorn the keystone of Henley Bridge —Isis looking up and Thamesis down the river. They are from the chisel of Mrs. Dawson Damer, who is famous as having been the first woman that followed the profession of sculpture in England. These carvings suggested the title of the present volume; and I have retained her more English, if less classical, spelling of the latter name.

'I have been,' says Horace Walpole, 'for a few days at Park Place, and have seen the delight of my eyes—the new bridge at Henley. "A Senator of Rome, while Rome survived," would have allowed it worthy of the Tiber; and it traverses a river a thousand times more beautiful; and some Verres, I suppose, some time or other will strip it of Mrs. Damer's colossal masks, and transport them to the capital of Europe, or America, or wherever that is to be.'—WALPOLE'S LETTER, *vol.* ix., *p.* 66.

ISIS AND THAMESIS

THE THAMES AT OXFORD



IN some parts of the Thames Valley, in the neighbourhood, for instance, of Henley, the parishes are so arranged that, even when the main part of their acreage is remote from the river, they have some access to it. This seems to point to a day when roads were few, ill constructed, and unsafe, and when the larger rivers were the most frequented highways of the country. They continued, indeed, with the aid of canals, to be the chief channels of goods traffic till far on in the first half of this century. Then came the railways, outbidding them with superior speed and convenience. For a time, which may be roughly stated as some seven or eight years on either side of the division of the century,

the Thames, for it is of the Thames only that I speak, was almost deserted. In my own boyhood and youth I spent much time upon the river, and I can recall days when the solitude so dear to an angler—and it was as an angler that I haunted the most 'fishy' of English rivers—was rarely broken by a passing boat. Two or three pleasure-boats, as many fishing-punts, and perhaps twice as many barges, would be all that would pass between sunrise and sunset. (It will be understood that I speak of those reaches of the river that are not in the immediate neighbourhood of towns.)

It is hardly necessary to say how much all this has changed. The barges are scarcely more frequent than they were; in some sections of the river they are, I fancy, less so. But a pleasure traffic, that is nothing less than vast, has sprung up; a continuous stream—on Bank holidays it may also be said a positive torrent—of boats, and, *infandum dictu*, of steam-launches, passes up and down the river. And here I would say a word, by the way, in defence of these much-abused persons, the riparian proprietors. It is not to be wondered at, when we compare what the Thames was and what it is, that they assert and seek to enforce the rights of private ownership over backwaters and islands. They once lived in seclusion, and they now find themselves in the blaze of publicity; they feel as the dweller in some remote farm-house might be supposed to feel if he found his home suddenly transported to Piccadilly. Their privacy is invaded by an army which, not without some of the unpleasing features of military occupation, bivouacs on their lawns and erects posts of observation opposite to their dining-room windows.

At Oxford, of course, the Thames never has been deserted. But anyone who revisits it after a lapse of five-and-twenty or thirty years may observe the remarkable change that has come over its aspect—at least as regards the upper river. This had but few visitors in those days; spatch-cocked eels and other attractions drew a few guests to the 'Trout,' at Godstow; and there were others who loved to 'track the shy Thames,' as Mr.

Matthew Arnold puts it in the most exquisite of his poems, far away from the noise and excitement of the lower river. But now the lower river is scarcely more crowded than the upper. The chief difference between them is that the former is devoted to business and the latter to pleasure; by business being meant not the carriage of coals, timber, and the like, but the solemn function of racing or preparing to race. Sometimes, indeed, when the floods are out—and it is a piece of rare good fortune if the floods are not out during a considerable part both of the Michaelmas and Lent Terms—the important business of 'tubbing' is carried on in the upper river. (By 'tubbing,' a word which will possibly convey a quite different idea to the uninitiated, is meant the practising of unfinished oarsmen in 'tubs' or heavy boats.) But on the whole it is to those who love the idleness of the river in its less strenuous form, or to the shy and unskilful oarsman who would avoid those formidable tyrants of the water, the eight-oars, that the Thames above Oxford commends itself. To this part of the stream, too, have been banished or removed by common consent the sailing-boats, whose wild career used to be a terror in former days to the throngs of rowers on the lower river. Their white canvas wings, as they fly to and fro in the broad reach above Binsey, are a picturesque feature in the landscape. The paternal government which the authorities of the University very properly exercise over their charges has a storm-flag hoisted when the weather is too rough to allow a sailing-boat to venture out with safety. It is a well-known fact that an Englishman has a great need, especially when he is young, of being protected against himself. He dearly loves to spice his pleasures with the sense of danger. The climb up a mountain-side charms him the more, the greater the chance it gives him of breaking his neck, and the river fascinates him most when he can discern a prospect of being drowned. What a characteristically English story is that of the way in which the last of the Montagues (descendants of Sir Anthony Brown, of Cowdray) came by his death some ninety years ago! He and a young friend of like mind visited Schaff-

hausen and determined to shoot the rapids below the great fall. It was represented to them that the attempt meant certain death, but represented in vain. The young Englishman, of course, thought that the 'foreign fellows' knew nothing about boating, and determined to persevere. Then the authorities intervened, and positively forbade the thing to be done. They even lined a great part of the river bank with troops; but the young men were too much for them. Like the Egyptian cats, who, Herodotus tells us, would leap into the fire and burn themselves to death, forcing their way through the cordon of agonised worshippers vainly seeking to hinder them, Lord Montague and his friend eluded the military guards, embarked in their boat, shot the rapids, and were drowned. Oxford, happily for the peace of mind of tutors and parents, has no such rapids (what a ruinously expensive army of police would be required to garrison the approach to them!), but the Oxford undergraduate does what he can. He shoots, or used to shoot, till it was guarded against him, the 'lasher' or weir at Iffley. He embarks, not knowing how to swim, in a boat in which he can no more balance himself than he can stand on a tight rope. He navigates the Cherwell, always perilous with its snags and overhanging boughs, and that when the river is in flood, and does it by preference after dark. The only wonder is that accidents are so rare.

Of this upper part of the 'Thames at Oxford' Godstow is the farthest boundary; nor is it, indeed, unworthy of being the point at which we may begin or end our travels. The ancient bridge, beneath which rushes down the clear stream, as yet unharmed by the pollutions of towns; the eddying pool, and, in effective contrast, the calm channel of the lock; the old inn, with its trim water-side alleys; Port Meadow, with its broad green expanse and grazing cattle, rich demesne of Oxford burgesses; and, rising in the near distance, the wooded slope of Wytham, these make such a picture of river beauty of the quieter sort as may not easily be surpassed.

Barges at Binsey

Fair as it is at all times, except perhaps when the floods have changed all the green of the landscape into a turbid yellow, the visitor should come by preference at the beginning of July, when the summer is at its highest—the undergraduate, if I may be allowed to say so, not too frequent—and the strawberries of Wytham ripe. When he has paid due respect to these, let him visit the one sight of Godstow—the nunnery ruins; though these are interesting more for what they recall than for what they have to show. Walls built too strongly or too roughly to tempt the

cupidity of house-builders and church-restorers; a ruined, roofless building, once St. Leonard's Chapel and the private oratory of the nuns; and, perhaps the most interesting of all, one or two curious plants, once cultivated by the nuns in their garden, and now the only living survivors of a long-vanished past, are all that remains to be seen.

From Godstow to Oxford is a distance of about two miles; as the river, purer and clearer than we shall ever see it again, gently carries us along, we catch across the Port Meadow, dotted with numerous cattle, our first glimpse of the spires of Oxford. The view is not as effective as that which may be found elsewhere, and one or two recent unsightly additions are unpleasingly prominent, but it is sufficiently striking. At Binsey Lock a whole settlement of people who live by the letting out of rowing and sailing boats has grown up. The changes in the University have brought into

Oxford a large population of permanent residents, and the Long Vacation is no longer a period of dreary inaction in which this waterside population has to consume the harvests gathered in during the 'flying terms.' They seem to be fairly prosperous, and the house-boats in which they live, free, it is to be presumed, of rent and taxes, look as comfortable as they are picturesque.

From Binsey we pursue our way to Oxford, having on our left the Banbury and Oxford Canal, which seems still to possess a fair

Ferry on the Oxford Canal

amount of traffic. It may be worth while to stop a few moments on our road and watch the picturesque industry of stripping osiers for basket-work, which is carried on in a yard which we pass upon our way. The delicate colour of the newly stripped wands is such as should delight the painter's eye. A somewhat intricate navigation, seldom traversed, takes us under the Abingdon Road, through the lock by Folly Bridge, into the lower river.

Before, however, we leave the upper river, we must turn aside to see the beautiful backwater which forms the lake in the gardens of Worcester College, to be approached, of course, only by the College gate, but, thanks to a kindly liberality on the part of the authorities, open to all visitors. The gardens are not so trim and gay as those which are the boast of St. John's, nor are they set

off by so picturesque an outline as that which delights the eye in the garden front of that College. New College, again, has a superior attraction in the massive remains of the old city wall. But Worcester alone rejoices in the possession of picturesque water, besides having a certain rural charm which is not found in its rivals; nowhere in Oxford can an hour in a summer afternoon be more pleasantly spent than on these shady lawns, or the

water-side walk under these arching willows. In this latter, close to a picturesque little gateway, the visitor will see a curious object which, if he knew the Oxford of a generation ago, will remind him of the past. This weather-beaten head was one of the two which once adorned the Broad Street front of what was then the Schools Building. A time honoured joke named them the 'Heads of Houses.' They have been dethroned to make room for modern successors, an emblem, it may be said, of the fate of their prototypes. What has become of the others I know not, but Worcester seems to have given a hospitable refuge to its own Saturn,

No stream in the world is, I suppose, more familiarly known, and more fondly remembered, than the three miles of river which, divided by Iffley Lock, and bounded by Sandford, furnishes the common boating-ground of Oxford. Still, a brief description may not inappropriately accompany our illustrations. The left bank of

the river is lined for several hundred yards by the gaily painted barges which are used as dressing-rooms, reading-rooms, and general lounging-places by the boat-clubs of the University and the various colleges. Before all these have found a place the river is joined by one of the most picturesque of its tributaries, the Cherwell. We may pause awhile to say something about this delightful stream, not the least of Oxford's many charms. As we follow its course upwards we have on our left hand the sinuous

walk that surrounds Christ Church Meadows, and may note especially some very fine specimens of willow. Beyond the Meadows we come to the Botanic Garden, and this passed to the famous Magdalen Bridge, now broadened to nearly twice its former width, and, we are bound to say, in spite of all doleful predictions to the contrary, rather improved than spoilt by the change. Then, still upon our left, comes Magdalen College itself, *facile princeps* for beauty of all that Oxford or Cambridge has to

show, with its stately hall and chapel, and its incomparably graceful tower.* Magdalen Walks, which are wholly surrounded by the two branches of the Cherwell, may compare for general beauty with Christ Church Meadows, though they cannot boast so many fine individual trees. One portion of them, the straight piece upon the north, bears the title of 'Addison's Walk,' so called after the poet, essayist, and statesman, who was for many years a Demy and Fellow of the College.

---

* The tower was built by Wolsey when he was bursar of the College, not a little, we are told, to the disgust of his brother fellows, who found their dividends sadly diminished by the necessary outlay.

From the precincts of Magdalen a journey of about six miles will take us to Islip. It is a somewhat difficult and laborious piece of navigation, and can only be effected in a boat of the lightest construction, so shallow, so rapid, and in many places so overgrown with weeds, is the river. The voyager, too, should be able and prepared to swim. But the journey is worth making. The scenery, without being at all striking, is the very perfection of quiet beauty. The rich pasture lands on either side, the overhanging trees, the clear stream, varying between quiet reaches, half overgrown with water-lilies, and rapids in which the long streaming plants wave to and fro in the rushing waters, and, if the journey be made in spring or early summer, the wealth of flowering plants combine to charm the eye.

Returning to the Thames, we find that for half-a-mile below the junction, it has a breadth which is at least respectable, enough for four boats to race abreast (to use the most appropriate standard of measure). After this the stream divides, part of it flowing under what are called the Long Bridges down to the 'Weirs,' once, and possibly now, the favourite haunt of those who fancied rat-killing, pigeon-shooting, and suchlike amusements. The main river, with a diminished volume of water and a narrower channel, makes a winding called the 'Gut,' a place of grievous trial for nervous or inexperienced hands that seek to steer a racing boat through it. Two or three furlongs more bring us to Iffley Lock. Here the mill-stream branches off to the left with a powerful current, as all who have rowed 'bow' in a boat coming out of the lock will have reason to remember.

Any one who carefully inspects the tow-path* side of the river will see certain small posts deeply fixed into the ground, and will

* The mention of the tow-path suggests a reminiscence which is curiously characteristic of Oxford ways. Everywhere else on the river this path is treated as a thoroughfare, but at Oxford it was blocked by a lofty door, defended with formidable nails. This was done, and allowed for many years almost without a murmur, in the interests of the watermen, who made a rich harvest by ferrying passengers across from Christ Church Meadows. The cut is now, I believe, left open, though probably few undergraduates save their pence by taking the longer round.

The Start from Iffley.
R.S.

find, if he measures the distance between them, that they are a hundred and sixty feet apart. These are the starting-points of the boats in the eight-oar races. It may be necessary to explain to the uninitiated that these are necessarily 'bumping' races. The boats are arranged in order, having the places which they occupied at the close of the last contest in the preceding year, the top-boat, or 'head of the river,' as it is called, being, of course, nearest to Oxford. A boat gains a place by overtaking the one before it. It has to show that this overtaking has been really accomplished

by actually touching, or 'bumping,' its antagonist.*

The eight-oar races are held twice in the year, in the Lent and Summer terms. The boats that row in the Lent term races are called the 'Torpids.' These races used to take place *after* the others; and it was a rule, which gave rise, it may be said by the way, to some little manœuvring, that no one should take part in them who had rowed for more than three nights in what is called, *par excellence*, the 'College Eight.' By a judicious change they have been transferred from the last to the second term of the

* A boat may gain, and sometimes has gained, three places in a single race. Boats A, B, C, and D start in this order. C bumps B. These two then withdraw from the course, and D has the right to row after A, and, if it can, to bump it. This, of course, can be done only when the superiority of D is very marked.

academical year, and serve, as it is natural that they should, as a preparation for the more important contest. The number of boats contending in these races has of late years so much increased* that it has been found necessary to separate them into two divisions. It is obvious that, if six-and-twenty boats (and this is, I believe, about the total of the two divisions) were ranged even with no more than a hundred feet† between them—and this is a distance which it would not be fair to diminish—the topmost boat would have but a very short space to traverse. The head-boat of the lower division rows also in the upper. Thus a career for merit is open.

The proud position of 'Head of the River' is one which is naturally much coveted. Some colleges inferior in numbers, or the previous preparation of the men who frequent them, have never attained it. Taking the last thirty-six years (1850—1885), the list stands thus (it may be observed that each college has had counted to it those years only in which it held the first place at the end of the races):—

Brazenose	8	Wadham	2
University	7	Corpus	2
Balliol	5	Hertford ...	1
Exeter	5	Magdalen ...	
Trinity	4	Pembroke ...	

The post of honour is now (1885) held by Corpus, which has also contrived to secure the same honourable position in the 'Torpids.' This achievement is the more remarkable because Corpus is one of the smallest colleges in the University (numbering less than *eighty* undergraduates).

The races themselves, which are repeated for six nights, present a sufficiently exciting scene. Each boat is attended by a

* It is a fact not generally known, and that may be mentioned in this place, that the number of Oxford undergraduates has been more than doubled within the last thirty years.

† An eight-oar is about sixty feet long. This deducted from the measure given above, leaves a clear distance of a hundred feet.

STRATHEDEN
PUTNEY & BACK
FARE 2.0

crowd of well-wishers, who advise, encourage, and exhort up to the last moment. The warning for preparation, and the signal for starting, are given by the firing of guns, an interval of five minutes separating the second from the first, and the third coming a minute after the second. This minute is a time of singular excitement. The boat is pushed out just an oar's length from the bank, the steersman holding a cord with a cork attached to keep it in its place,—a process, complicated by the vagaries of the stream, in which the bow-oar, and occasionally No. 2, have to assist by a gentle stroke. This occupation affords a not unwelcome relief to the suspense with which the rowers await the signal of the start. A friend is stationed on the bank, watch in hand and cries, 'Ten seconds gone;' 'Half-a-minute gone;' 'Ten seconds more;' while another watches for the flash of the signal-gun, for to wait for the report would be to lose a perceptible portion of time. Then comes the cry, 'Off!' and the race begins. A rower is supposed to see nothing but the back of the oarsman in front of him, and 'Eyes in the boat,' is one of the strictest maxims of the boating code. Yet it is possible to have some notion of what is going on. The most conscientious oarsman can see out of the corner of his eye whether the crowds of partisans that accompany each boat are coming nearer to each other, whether his own friends are overtaking the friends of the boat in advance, or are themselves being overtaken by the friends of the boat that follows. If he sternly keeps even the corner of his eye in subjection, he can at least hear the shouts, and whether they are exhortations to escape defeat or to secure victory. The truest and happiest sign of all is when he feels that the water grows rough under his oar. It is not easy to row in the 'wash' of a boat that is immediately in front, but the feeling that victory is at hand more than makes up for the difficulty.

To speak of boats and boat-races without saying a few words about 'bump suppers' and boating suppers (for to have made a bump is, for obvious reasons, not considered a necessary condition of having a supper) would be to leave the subject incomplete.

The oarsman who is considered worthy of a place in his college eight must go through a certain amount of training,—

'Multa tulit fecitque puer, sudavit et alsit.'

The short Oxford course does not, indeed, require the severe preparation which is needed for the distance, fully four times as long, that divides Putney from Mortlake; still some kind of discipline in the matter of food and drink, &c., is, or is considered to be, necessary. The quantity of liquid taken is strictly limited, at

least in theory. (In my day we were, if I remember right, restricted to a quart of every kind—a most inadequate and, indeed, impossible allowance.*) And a severe captain looks askance at a pipe, particularly if he does not smoke himself. Early rising, too, is more or less strictly enforced, and morning chapel is regarded with a favour which is, perhaps, not wholly religious in its motive. Add to this the consumption, at least twice a-day, of an abnormally

* A healthy man of average size, in full exercise, requires at least twice as much.

large quantity of beef and mutton, and you have a fairly complete account of training for the 'eights.'*

For these austerities some compensation is naturally expected, and after the last of the six races has been rowed comes the supper, in which the victors celebrate their triumph and the vanquished console themselves for their defeat. What these festivities now are I do not pretend to know, but I remember that in my day it was the fashion to make the supper-room as like as was possible to the parlour of a tavern. I do not think that we went as far as sanding the floor, but we set out the table after a severe, ultra-Spartan fashion, with shag tobacco in saucers and long clay pipes, while we drank 'purl' (the 'dog's-nose' of *Pickwick*), a hideous mixture of gin and beer, which I am sure none of us relished. The undergraduate has probably grown more refined in his tastes, but he is certainly not less noisy in his demonstrations of delight. The festivities of the occasion are not, it may be supposed, diminished by a custom which seems to have recently come into existence of the crew of a bumped boat paying a visit, it may be supposed, of respectful homage, to their 'bumpers.' These gentlemen have also supped, and, indeed, are not unlike the *comissatores* of classical times—revellers who, having enjoyed themselves sufficiently in one house, used to burst into another, and there renew their festivities. A crew that has had a very successful career might have even an embarrassing number of these visitors. Indeed it is necessary for the porter of the triumphant college to exercise his office with severity, and even to keep the gate against all strangers. A bonfire is naturally made one of the chief symbols of delight, one of the *triumphalia ornamenta* with which a victorious college delights to decorate itself. Bonfires used to be almost a pecu-

* It is a curious proof of the progress of the cult of athleticism that a custom has grown up of 'breakfasting the eight.' A list of men desirous of this honour is hung up among the college notices at the beginning of term, and the days are soon filled up, the young demigods visiting each worshipper in turn as Zeus and the other Olympians went to feast among the blameless Æthiopians.

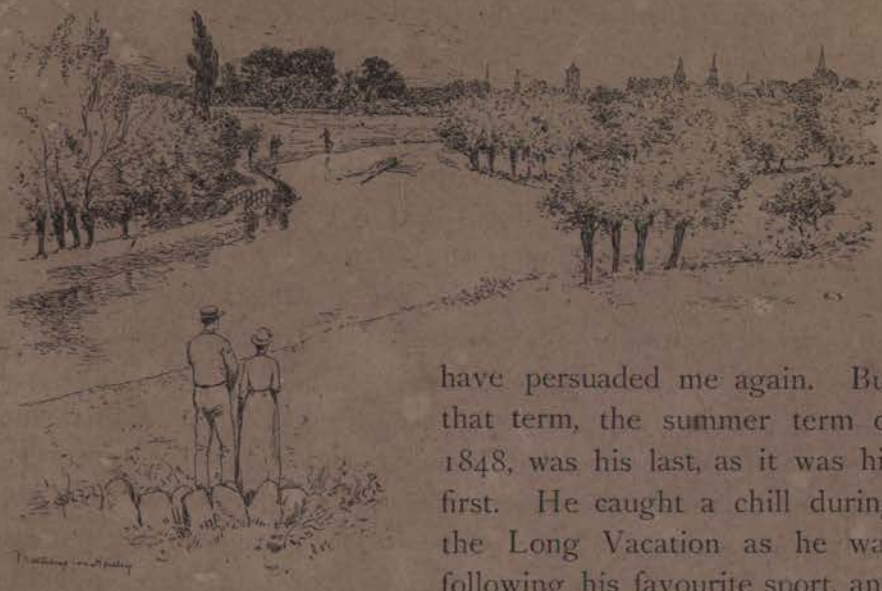
liarity of the aristocratic society of Christ Church, which, when it was tired of burning in effigy a Dean or a Canon, used to burn a classical statue. This exclusiveness, if we may so call it, has now broken down. One of the very newest colleges, proud of having achieved this crowning honour before it had even entered its teens, lit a bonfire which had almost reduced Bodley's Library to ashes. Even the most enthusiastic patriots were ready to confess in their cooler moments that this would have been too big a price to pay even for so valuable a distinction. The bonfire, indeed, may well seem, even to the most tolerant judgment, an objectionable form of rejoicing. As the proper materials are not at hand—for who could smuggle in under his gown a barrel of pitch or a dozen of fagots?—a good many things are used which are certainly not intended for the purpose; to wit, the 'oaks,' or outer doors of the rooms, the furniture of a studious freshman, books, and the like. Then a hideous scar is inflicted on the beautiful turf, the exquisite result of centuries of care.* And, lastly, there is always an appreciable chance of a catastrophe, which has hitherto been wonderfully averted from the colleges of both Universities—a destructive fire.

It is pleasant, however, to be able to say that, notwithstanding two or three little follies which might conveniently be retrenched, the amusements of the undergraduates are followed, on the whole, with more moderation and good sense than was formerly the case. They are considerably more varied than they were, but they interfere less with reading. The college races, for instance, which used to occupy more than two weeks, are now contracted into one; and cricket, which used to be almost fatal to a whole day's reading, is now, for the most part, but an ordinary afternoon's recreation.

A few words remain to be said about angling. The river at Oxford, disturbed as it is by incessant boating, does not promise

* The porter of one of the colleges is said to have given this answer to an American visitor who asked him, 'How do you get this beautiful turf?'—'Well, ma'am, we rolls it and we mows it for a thousand years.'

very well in this respect. I used to feel this so strongly in my undergraduate days that I never went out, enthusiastically fond as I was of the sport. For 'never,' perhaps I ought to write 'hardly ever,' for I do remember one solitary excursion, from which I returned empty-handed. It was a very dear friend of mine, an angler even more devoted than myself, who persuaded me to go. Perhaps, if our friendship had been permitted to last, he might



have persuaded me again. But that term, the summer term of 1848, was his last, as it was his first. He caught a chill during the Long Vacation as he was following his favourite sport, and died before the beginning of the October term. A simpler, more affectionate, brighter, purer soul than Clement Ellis, never lived.

'Fungar inani
Munere.'

But what is wanting to my own experience, a friend whose recollections have the advantage of being much more recent kindly enables me to supply. I shall give his own words, with a few changes:—

'I went, perhaps, most frequently to the "Weirs," the backwater near the Abingdon Road. Here my success was not great. I do not remember

anything bigger in the way of jack than a fish of 8½ lbs. I once, however, saw two very large fish which had been caught in one day in the lower pool of this water [caught, but how?]. There were also some fine tench to be had in the summer in some quiet places.

'At the Weirs I used to fish by myself, but when going farther down the river I used to take a fisherman. I once or twice went out with one of the notorious poaching B., but he did not lead me to victory. My best fishing was with one Charles Simmonds, a professional cricketer in summer and a fisherman in winter. He kept his punt at Sandford. With him I got a good many jack, especially in the weir pool at Sandford, and in other pools between that place and Nuneham. My great take was a *twenty-three-pounder*. This was on February 19th, 1875. It was a bitterly cold day, snowing, with a north-east wind. We were fishing on the Oxfordshire side, just above Nuneham. We had got three or four small jack in the morning, but had had no run for a long time, and at three in the afternoon my friend, who was not an enthusiast, began to get tired of it. Presently I saw a number of small fry jump up round my float. The next moment down it went, like lightning. I struck, and felt a dead resistance, like the bottom of the river. Well, there was a hard struggle for about five minutes, but I held him very tight by Simmonds' advice, and the fish was soon "gaffed" and in the punt. Simmonds had got one of 21 lbs. earlier in the season in the same place. His joy, I remember, at our success was expressed in phrases of devout thanksgiving which were not quite in accord with his usual conversation. The fish was in beautiful condition, the extreme length being just under 3 feet 6 inches. Simmonds began fishing with gap tackle, but while I knew him took to the snap, using a single triangle, with one hook stuck under the back fin. This was the tackle with which my twenty-three-pounder was taken. As usual on the Upper Thames we used very light tackle, having a long tapering float, with one small bullet, or some big shot. Simmonds used the same tackle for roach as for jack, only substituting gut for gimp, with, of course, a single hook. I had some very good roach-fishing one winter below Sandford. I remember taking one day *fifteen* which weighed *eleven* pounds, and another *twenty-two* which weighed fifteen. I noticed that on very cold frosty days, when the line was stiff with ice, roach would take very well, though no other fish would feed. We used to bait with lob-worms.'

Oxford, which has attached to itself so large a suburb northwards towards Woodstock and Banbury, has made but little advance on its southern side; and Iffley, rising pleasantly above the somewhat dreary plain which divides it from the city, has

nearly the same appearance as it may be supposed to have had a hundred years ago. Its 'wooded height' is insignificant as compared with the bolder hills of Streatley, the fine stretch of the Quarry Woods by Marlow, or the well-timbered heights of Clifden, but it breaks with an agreeable contrast the monotony which here characterises the Thames Valley.

The course of the river from Iffley to Sandford, and Sandford itself, offers little to detain us. Its little river-side inn is gratefully remembered by thousands of old Oxford men. For Sand-

ford is the limit of the ordinary course traversed by the eight-oars in their practice. The 'long course,' extending to Nuneham, three miles farther down, is seldom visited, except by the University boat, which has of course to prepare itself for the four-mile race at Putney. Who that has once experienced them does not remember the grateful interval of rest and the welcome draught of ale, only too sternly limited by the training maxims of the 'captain,' which Sandford afforded?

Melancholy associations are attached to the Sandford 'lasher.' The fall of the river is here unusually deep, and the main body of the current descends through a single opening, producing below a dangerous eddy, which has sometimes proved fatal even

to practised swimmers. A monument bears the names of two undergraduates, one of them the son of Dr. Gaisford, predecessor of Dr. Liddell in the deanery of Christ Church, who perished there now about forty years ago.

A stream noticeably more rapid than any which we have yet found in our voyage carries us quickly down to Nuneham, the eastward limit, as it may be reckoned, of the 'Thames at Oxford,' as Godstow is the western. The University crew,

indeed, when practising for the great London race, extends its travels as far as Abingdon, but the college eights and the humbler followers of the boating art seldom go below this point. It is also a well-known spot to the visitors, who do so much to increase the too delightful idleness of the summer. A picnic at Nuneham is one of the amusements crowded into the Commemoration week. And when the Long Vacation permits the citizens of Oxford to enjoy their own again, this is the favourite resort of school-treats and other forms of popular pleasure. A more suitable spot for such delight it would not be easy to find, and the kindness of its owners puts it at the the disposal of the public. The right bank of the river has

little to show beyond an expanse of rich pasture-ground; but the left has been favoured by nature with advantages which art has done much to increase. The wooded slopes of Nuneham, as one saw them, it may be half a lifetime ago, lustrous with the sunshine of a noonday in June, made a picture that never can be forgotten. The property was purchased by the Harcourt family in 1710 from Earl Wemyss. The park and the pleasure-grounds of the mansion were laid out by a landscape-gardener famous in his day, whose ingenuity, boldness, and facility of device, earned for him the name of 'Capability Brown.' He was aided by the suggestions of William Mason, a poet of some note in his day, who is now best remembered by his biography of Gray, and by the monument in Poet's Corner which records his name. The 'Garden' in which the poet inculcated in polished verse the precepts of his favourite pursuit, has shared the fate which has overtaken Dyer's 'Fleece' and John Philips' 'Cyder;' but it shows that the author was a master of his subject. An urn to his memory was erected by Lady Harcourt in the flower-garden of Nuneham, and bears witness to his 'simple manners, piety, and steady friendship.' The name of another poet, Thomas Whitehead,* less successful in his time than Mason, and now more completely forgotten, is

---

* Whitehead also has his memorial at Nuneham; and as it comes from the pen of his friend and brother-poet, Mason, the reader may possibly care to see it:—

'Harcourt and friendship this memorial raise,
Near to the oak where Whitehead oft reclined;
While all that nature, robed by art, displays,
Soothed with congenial charms his polished mind.
Let fashion's vot'ries, let the sons of fire,
The genius of that modest bard despise,
Who bade discretion regulate his lyre,
Studious to please, but scorning to surprise.
Enough for him, if those who shared his love
Through life, who virtue more than verse revere,
Here pensive pause, while circling round the grove,
And drop the heartfelt tribute of a tear.'

associated with Nuneham. The friend and patron of these two men of letters was a diplomatist of some distinction,* but is better remembered as one of the correspondents of Horace Walpole. His son, with whom the title became extinct, seems to have formed himself somewhat after the model of a French seigneur of the better kind. He instituted an order of merit among his tenants, and rewarded the virtues of temperance, honesty, and the like with medals. The medallists enjoyed the distinction of having their names recorded on the walls of the parish church. This church, an ancient edifice dating back beyond the middle of the twelfth century, a yew which may well be coeval with it, and a stone cross, are the sights which the village has to show.

---

* The present owners of Nuneham are descended from his sister.

ABINGDON AND DORCHESTER

FOLLOWING the Thames downwards from Nuneham we find it making a curious loop, exceeding anything that is to be found in any other part of its course. It does not indeed meander like the Euphrates at Ardericca, of which Herodotus tells us that they who sail thereon come thrice to this same village on

three several days; but its course is strangely circuitous, and, it must be owned, a little tedious. From the 'Cottage' in Nuneham Park to Clifton Hampden Bridge is, as the crow flies, little more than a mile and a half; but the pedestrian who follows the towpath will find the distance to be very nearly eight.* The Oxfordshire shore still shows as far as Culham some rising ground, but the river valley generally, as far as natural features are concerned, is somewhat uninteresting. It takes us, however, to a town in which we may linger awhile, and not unprofitably.

The glory of Abingdon was its monastery, which ranked,

* On an average the river course is a little more than twice the distance measured in a straight line. From Folly Bridge, Oxford, to London Bridge is 112 miles, while the distance by road is about fifty-six.

both in antiquity and dignity, second only to Glastonbury. Its chroniclers claimed King Lucius as its founder. Nothing is now left of the Abbey but a few fragments of the domestic buildings, two or three rooms, still roofed, and used, I believe, for store-houses, and some arches, columns, and other fragments, enclosed in a private garden. More authentic history assigns its origin to the reign of Centwin, king of the West Saxons, in the latter half of the seventh century. But its authentic founder was Edred, grandson of the great Alfred. The Abbey chroniclers are loud in his praise, telling, among other things, how at least one miracle was wrought in his honour. Coming one day to inspect the work of restoration, then just in its commencement, he measured all the foundations with his own hands, and, his work finished, was invited by the Abbot to dine. Edred had a gay company of Northumbrians with him, and he and they helped themselves freely to the metheglin. The Abbot's store consisted, it would seem, of but one flagon; but in this the liquor was never permitted to fall more than a span below the brim. All day long, we are told, the company sat and feasted without exhausting the cup. At night the 'Northumbrians departed with great joy.'

Abingdon makes little mark in history. In Saxon days the kings of Wessex seem sometimes to have had their residence there, and to have sorely burdened the Abbey with the expense of their retinues. The Conqueror was entertained here in 1084 by Robert D'Oyly. In 1451 the insurrection, known commonly by the name of 'Jack Cade,' appeared in the town, its bailiff for the time being a ringleader. In the wars of the Commonwealth some fierce fighting took place in it, the Cavaliers from Oxford making several desperate efforts to recover it out of the hands of the Parliamentarians. We read that in the last of them (March 1646), Prince Rupert got within the fortifications and posted five hundred men 'within the Abbey,' which we may therefore conclude to have still existed in tolerable preservation.

Abingdon is a town of a certain picturesqueness of appearance, but it can hardly be said to show its best side to the river. The

old inn, almost overhanging the water, of which we give an illustration, is a noticeable object. It bears every sign of having accommodated many generations of travellers by water; but it looks, it must be confessed, at least as well on paper as in reality. The market-place, an irregular quadrangle in shape, and surrounded by houses which show an agreeable variety in style, is somewhat, if not much, above the average of country-town *fora*. Of the town-hall, erected in the last year of the seventeenth century, we may say, now that it is permitted to admire buildings other than Gothic, that it is handsome. The Church of St. Nicholas (which must have stood just on the outskirts of the Abbey buildings, and which one passes on the way to see what remains of them) shows a Norman doorway which is worth inspection. The other church, St. Helen's, is spacious, and, in its way, imposing. On one side of the churchyard stands what is perhaps the most picturesque building in the town, a row of almshouses, which owe their existence to the ancient foundation of the hospital of the Holy Cross, a name changed after the Reformation to Christ's Hospital. The low-roofed wooden cloister, plentifully adorned with texts, which shelters the doors of the almshouses, is a feature which one does not often see in England.

Clifton Hampden, a little village on the Oxfordshire bank, lies, so to speak, at the back of Nuneham Park, and continues to show something of its picturesque scenery. It takes the first half of its name from the cliff which here rises from the river, a striking feature, all the more grateful to the traveller's eye after the level region through which he has been passing, though not to be compared for a moment to the genuine cliffs, overhung with masses of varied foliage, which are to be seen in the Quarry Woods below Marlow and in Park Place between Henley and Wargrave. The 'cliff' is a bank of sandstone, about thirty feet in height, on which stands the one object of interest which the village possesses—the parish church.

A course of about two miles, giving but little to note on either bank of the river, brings us from Clifton Hampden to Day's

Lock, itself almost exactly a mile above the junction of the Thame with the main river, and the most convenient spot for halting for a visit to Dorchester. The interest of the scenery now increases, but it is on the Berkshire, not, as before, on the Oxfordshire, bank that its bolder features are found. The picturesque village of Little Wittenham, with the wood that bears the same name, are in the near neighbourhood of the river, and beyond the wood rise, crowned with their groves of beech-trees, the conspicuous heights

of Sinodun Hill and its lesser and nameless companion. The range of down-like hills runs for about two miles parallel to the river till it comes to an end opposite to Shillingford. Sinodun Hill was, without doubt, the scene of important events in the history of the Roman Conquest of Britain. The earthworks and entrenchments upon it remain, little obliterated by time and cultivation, and archaeologists are, I believe, agreed in supposing them to be British work. About the origin and meaning of the remarkable constructions, locally known as *Dorchester Dykes*, there has been more doubt, and the controversy is not yet settled. The works consist of a double rampart, with a deep ditch between, cutting off a bend of the river, which they touch, or nearly touch,

for the plough has been busy at either extremity. Common opinion has hitherto been that the Dykes are Roman work; and

the late Mr. J. H. Parker, an archaeologist of no mean authority, declares that their Roman origin must be evident to any observer.

For myself, I do not pretend to be an expert in these matters, but I may say that I was struck by the resemblance between these

massive ramparts and the undoubtedly British constructions of Avebury in Wiltshire.

Dorchester was in Saxon times the seat of a bishopric. After the Conquest this was removed to Lincoln. In the next century Bishop Alexander founded here a monastery of Black Canons, and the stately church which now dominates the town was, in part at least, of his building. Dorchester owes its preservation to Richard Beauforest, a wealthy burgher of the time, and probably a kinsman of an Abbot Beauforest, whose highly decorated tomb still remains in the church. Beauforest gave 140*l.* for the fabric, a sum which may be reckoned at about 3000*l.* of our money; and it remains, after three centuries of neglect and damage which a more pious or more tasteful generation has now begun to repair, a splendid monument of his liberality. It does not pretend to the dignity of a minster, nor can it even be ranked with such parish churches as St. Botolph's at Boston; but it has the grandeur of size and stately proportions, especially in its great length of 200 feet, the uninterrupted view of which makes no small impression on the visitor. It contains, too, many objects of interest. The east window is of unusual magnitude and beauty, and the 'Jesse' window, on the north side of the Lady Chapel or Presbytery, is one of the most curious examples of painted glass in England. 'In the centre at the base of the tree is sculptured the recumbent figure of Jesse, and from his body rises the tree. The branches are ornamented with foliage their whole length, and with a figure sculptured at each intersection of a mullion; that of David occupying the lower angle on the east side. Some of them are male, some female; several are crowned, and some have wings.' 'The chancel wall,' writes Leland, 'hath all been painted very gloriously with all sorts of beastes.' These are no longer to be seen, but pieces of pattern still remain.

The Thame, which flows through Dorchester, though not a navigable stream, is one of the chief affluents of the more important river to which, indeed, according to one account, it contributes the greater part of its name. 'Thame and Isis,' writes Camden,

'here, as it were, join hands in wedlock, and with their streams unite their names; and as the Jor and Dan in the Holy Land, and the Dor and Don in France, form the Jordan and the Dordon, so these rivers go by the compound name of Tamesis.' But it may be remarked that while Camden's illustrative instances are anything but conclusive, on the other we find the full name Tamesis in the earliest mention of Britain, the 'Commentaries of Caesar;'* nor can there be any reasonable doubt that this name was attached to the main river from its source to its mouth. The name Isis does not occur till it is used by Leland in his 'Itinerary.' The word, however, bears a curious resemblance to 'Ouse,' the British name so commonly given to rivers, a name of which there is an undoubted survival in Oseney, still one of the suburbs of Oxford, and possibly in Oxford itself; Oxford being, according to some etymologists, a corruption of Ousenford or Osenford. It would be an interesting fact, if we could find that 'Isis' was the classical form given by the scholars of Oxford to the Ouse of the popular language.

---

* The Greek geographer, Pytheas, seems to have visited Britain about the close of the fourth century B.C., but his works are not extant.

LIBRARY OF THE BOMBAY BRANCH OF THE ROYAL ASIATIC SOCIETY

WALLINGFORD, STREATLEY, AND BASILDON

FOR not a few miles below Dorchester the valley of the Thames spreads widely on either side of the river. Level breadths of pasture, here and there diversified with hedge timber, with now and then the tower of a village church—for this is a land of towers rather than of steeples—have a charm of their own which it is beyond the power of pen or pencil to represent. Here we may see in perfection the characteristics of our scenery which our kinsmen from across the Atlantic view with so much admiration, the intensely vivid colour of grass and foliage; the elaborate finish, so to speak, of the cultivation, each field being as trim as a garden, and the mellowness and harmony of hue and outline, which make cottage and farmhouse like natural growths of the soil. See these things in the rare but delicious sunshine of an English summer day, and you have a picture of quiet, satisfying beauty; but it is a picture which seems to defy the cunningest attempt to transfer it to paper or canvas.

It must be confessed that our country towns are generally the least pleasing features of our scenery. They seldom possess a public building of any dignity, except, it may be, the church; the elevation of the domestic architecture is monotonous and mean, the streets wanting in width and unrelieved by gardens and avenues. Wallingford is little above the average of its fellows. It is, indeed, but the shadow of its former self. The eleven, or, as Leland has it, the fourteen churches of six centuries ago, have dwindled to three, none of them particularly noteworthy; and the Castle, once one of the largest and strongest fortresses in the kingdom, is a shapeless mass of ruins. Yet the town is worth a visit if only for the varied interest which attaches to it. Few places appear more frequently in English history. It disputes with St. Albans the honour of having been that 'town of Cassive-

launus,' the way to which Caesar learnt from a traitorous Briton. It was here that the sons of Cunobelin disputed with Aulus Plautius, the lieutenant of Claudius, the passage of the Thames. And not far from here, on Aston Downs, Alfred broke for a while the power of the Danes. In the Castle (the predecessor of that of which a few ruins still exist) the Conqueror was entertained by Wigod de Wallingford. To the new Castle Matilda fled from Oxford, in that famous escape of hers across the frozen Thames. And here died* the lady who in her youth had been called the

Fair Maid of Kent. Of course it had its part in the Civil Wars; it held out for the King, even after Oxford had surrendered, and was almost the last place to yield to the Parliament.

Proceeding down the stream from Wallingford, we pass, on the Oxfordshire shore, Crowmarsh, with its Norman church, a domain which we find the Conqueror attaching to his foundation of Battle Abbey, and Newnham Murrell. Crowmarsh and Newnham are, indeed, near neighbours of the town; and in one of the plague years (1671) we hear of wardens being 'sett at the great

*She died of grief, it was said, because Richard II. (her son by the Black Prince) refused to pardon Sir John Holland, his half-brother, son of her first husband, Sir Thomas Holland.

bridge to keep out all Crowmarsh and Newnham people out of Wallingford.' The wardens seem to have done their work effectually, 'for though,' says the historian, 'there dyed of the plague in the two parishes sixteene persons . . . . throwe God's mercie, our Towne of Wallingforde was preserved.' Two or three miles lower down, we pass on the Oxfordshire bank the pleasant demesne of Mongewell, with its gardens and woods

sloping down to the river's edge; and then, not far below, we strike for the first time the main line of the Great Western railway, which has a station at Moulsford, a pleasant little village, adorned with stately elms, on the Berkshire shore.

It is not long after leaving Moulsford before we see the hills on either side beginning to draw in and narrow the river valley. Streatley Down, on the right-hand bank, is a bolder and more commanding height than we have seen before, or indeed shall see again, in our journeyings by the river. Its slopes, fringed with woods, and dotted with juniper, are a noble feature in the land-

scape; and those who will climb its not very difficult heights will find their trouble repaid by its wealth of wild flowers.

The river is here spanned by a long wooden bridge, which has at either end the villages of Streatley and Goring. They have been but little spoilt by the tide of pleasure traffic which flows so strongly up and down the Thames. One or two ugly, staring houses, have indeed been built, and the river-side inn, which now, instead of the beer and bacon and eggs

of former days, offers to the guest its wine-carte and its *menu*, is somewhat less rustic than of old, but substantially the villages are unchanged. Near Goring, which belongs to Oxfordshire, the traveller may see, if he be not unwilling to turn aside a little from his route, the little inn among the beechwoods where Charles I., then in confinement at Caversham, was wont, it is said, to solace his captivity with a game at bowls. The sign-board records the event in lines which are epigrammatic enough to be worth repeating:—

'Stop, traveller, stop! In yonder peaceful glade
His favourite game the Royal Martyr played;

Here, stripp'd of honours, children, freedom, rank,
Drank from the bowl, and bowl'd for what he drank,—
Sought in a cheerful place his cares to drown,
And changed his guinea ere he lost his crown.'

Not far from the river bank is the church. The massive tower, with its late Norman windows and its round staircase on the north side, is worthy of note. It will be well if the visitor's curiosity does not lead him farther. The rest of the building is disappointing, and the south side is disfigured by a peculiarly unsightly restoration.

The towing-path bank, as we follow it down from the bridge to Basildon ferry, a distance of somewhat more than a mile, would seem, with its deep and quiet eddies, to be a very paradise of what I may call the professional bank-fisher. This person is a familiar object by the river-side on all the Sundays of the season, from its commencement* in the middle of June till the shortened days of the late autumn or an early flood come to stop his operations. He is commonly an artisan, small shopkeeper, or clerk. The earliest train brings him, with his stock in trade, to the river-side. He has commonly two rods, one fitted for roach-fishing, the other a lay-by, baited with gudgeon or small dace, for some wandering jack or perch. Forked sticks to raise his rods from the ground, a square basket which has carried his provisions, and is meant to carry his spoil, and a little stool on which he sits, complete his outfit. Thus he 'watches his trembling quill' till the time comes for the last train to convey him to town.

It is his habit, seldom or never broken I fancy, to keep throughout the day, and, indeed, day after day, to the place which he has chosen. It is his favourite 'swim;' he knows every inch of it, and fears that if he goes farther, he may fare worse.† And,

* All fishing, except for trout, is forbidden in the Thames from March 15 to June 15. Trout may be caught, fortune favouring, on and after April 1.

† This habit of some anglers of remaining immovably fixed in one place is often doubtless judicious, but it may be carried to a ludicrous extent. I remember, many years ago, going with a noted Thames angler to fish in a certain piece of

indeed, it would not be easy for him to find, so numerous are his companions in the art, another rest of advantage. The bank-fisher's patience is unlimited, and he has, besides, a certain skill of his own. Trout-fishing is a finer, and in our clear English streams an incomparably more difficult art, but the roach-fisher has a certain quickness of eye and delicacy of touch which the beginner will find himself very far from possessing. Returned to town, the bank-fisher will often go to the weekly *rendezvous* of his fishing-club. There he and his friends compare their captures,

prizes being sometimes allotted to the heaviest. If I were to be asked what amount of success these diligent anglers commonly have, I should not find it easy to answer. In years, now I am sorry to say, long passed, I have seen them with baskets of fish which the present fisher would envy. Things do not go so well

water. It was, I think, in Lord Carrington's park at High Wycombe. My friend trolled for jack, the only kind of fishing which he favoured. The process of trolling consists in throwing out a dead bait, heavily weighted with lead, with as much length of line as the angler can command, and drawing it in again by degrees. My friend stood doing this with untiring pertinacity from about 11 a.m. till late in the evening, and never changed his place by so much as a yard. About 6 p.m., if I remember right, his patience was rewarded by the capture of a small jack, which, wearied out, one would think, by his pertinacity, took the bait.

with them now. The incessant passage of boats up and down the river sadly disturbs their sport, and has begun to drive them to places, the Arun for instance, less likely to be invaded by the frivolity of rowing.

Some of my own pleasantest recollections of Thames angling are connected with Basildon. It is a little village on the Berkshire shore, which seems to have wisely retreated to the slope of the hill, leaving its church, quite solitary save for the parsonage, in the river-side meadows. I found it the other day,

after the interval of more than the third of a century, during which I have never seen it except from the railway, quite unchanged. The river, which was once almost a solitude, has become, for nearly half the year, a thronged highway, but this change has reached very little beyond the actual banks. One new house has been built in Basildon. The village innkeeper has, I see, added to his occupations the business of keeping the 'general shop.' The cottages, brilliant six-and-thirty years with their stucco and paint (for this is a model village, thanks to the deep purse of a millionaire, Mr. Morrison of Basildon Park), have had their hues mellowed by time. The poplar by the White House, which was so close that I could almost have touched the squirrels, as they ran up, from my bedroom window, has grown prodigiously,

and, after the manner of this short-lived tree, is now almost in its decay. But the village is curiously unchanged.

Here, if I may be allowed to gossip for a while about the Thames as it was many years ago, I spent the summer of 1848—my first Long Vacation. The undergraduate of that day, happier—perhaps I ought to say, less happy—than his successor, had not the fear of Moderations before his eyes, and 'Greats' seemed almost indefinitely remote. That first vacation was spent chiefly on the river, the pleasantest of times, though I now recollect it with something like remorse. My acquaintance with the Thames was even then of some standing, and I had made myself a proficient in the mystery of managing a punt. The art of making a punt move forward—not in a circle, as it seems naturally disposed to do—is not mastered at the first, or even the second essay. And when this has been acquired there remains, if you wish to use it for the purpose of the fisherman, the art of 'fixing' it. The 'rye-pegs' (I am very doubtful about the spelling of the word), the heavy iron-shod poles by which the punt is moored, require some measure both of strength and skill for their management. To fix them firmly when the river bed is of stony gravel, when the water is deep and the stream runs strong, and, most grievous trial of all, the wind helps the current to tear you away from the coveted spot: this is no easy matter. I must own that there were places where I never could succeed, just as there were boisterous days when only the strength and skill of the professional fisherman could contend with adverse stream and wind. But it was a great thing to be able to do without this same professional. He was expensive, not that his seven or eight shillings a-day were not well earned; and he was apt to be somewhat of a bore. I have kindly recollections of many of them—of the Cresswells of Marlow; of Rush of Streatley; of Stone of Henley, too much given, I am afraid, to beer, but with as keen an eye for all that concerned his art as any man on the Thames; and William Parrott, still flourishing, I believe, at Henley, a most respectable man, a real conversationalist, as I have found during many a pleasant summer,

aye, and winter day, and one who knows every inch of the river, and I might almost say, every noteworthy fish that swims in it. And it was always a luxury, and not an unprofitable luxury, to put oneself for a day in the charge of one of these skilful fellows. Still, on the whole, the idea of sport was much more realised when one shifted for oneself. There was something of the same difference that there must be between standing to shoot game driven over one's head or before one's feet, and going out to seek it for oneself. Of course a good deal of time is lost in vain attempts and unprofitable experiments. The river at Basildon was at first wholly unknown to me, and though general experience was useful, it did not stand instead of the local knowledge which fixes by certain landmarks or watermarks, a rush bed, a pollard willow, a river-side bush, or the like, the favourite haunt of pike or perch, the hole where the chub congregate, and the 'swim' for roach or gudgeon. Gudgeon-fishing (I speak in the present tense, though I do not know how far things are changed) is the chief resource of the Thames angler during the summer months, and the gudgeon are curiously capricious in their choice of place of abode. As a rule they love a bottom of sand or fine gravel; and the practised ear can often tell by the sound of the iron of the pole as it strikes the ground whether the fish is likely to be found in the neighbourhood. But the eye is the best guide. To drift slowly down and watch the bottom closely for the fish that may be feeding upon it is an excellent plan, if only the water be clear enough. And, indeed, unless it is clear, gudgeon-fishing will yield but little sport.

Basildon, I remember, was not then so good a place for this kind of angling—a very humble kind indeed, but one that has sometimes pleased the good and wise—as other parts of the river that I have known. And the summer of 1848, rainy even up to the mark of the seasons that have lately mocked us with the name, was not a favourable time. It was said, too, that the building of the railway bridge, by altering the flow of the river, had spoilt the best gudgeon swim in the neighbourhood.

The *habitats* of the roach—and the roach is, next to the gudgeon, the commonest of Thames fishes—are more easily found. During the summer months, at least, these fish lie in the weeds; the nearer the angler can approach to them, so that the place be clear enough for his line to travel unimpeded, the better he will fare, and his chances of success will be increased in proportion as his 'swim' is deep and rapid. To give the day to the gudgeon, and the evening, from the time when the sun was low in the sky till the float could no longer be seen, to the roach, was the

approved plan. When the day was bright the last half-hour of twilight (for which it was well to reserve the most productive spot) would often yield more than all the time before. The rainy days and thickened water of this particular summer were as favourable to the capture of roach as they were ill suited to the taking of gudgeon. I have preserved no 'game-book,' and cannot produce any precise numbers, but I have a recollection of successful days. One of the reaches below Basildon, where the river is divided by a long eyot, leaving a very narrow channel for the navigation, and a broad space diversified by rush beds on the

other side, was very productive. Here, too, an occasional chub sometimes diversified the sport, not unfrequently breaking the tackle in the great plunge which this fish commonly makes when he first feels the hook. I remember to this day one monster which sailed away with my float, and how I followed him, catching sight from time to time of this token of his course, but followed him in vain.

With the better kinds of fish, jack and perch (for of trout I scarcely so much as heard), I had but little success, less than at any time before or since during all my acquaintance with the river. I cannot but think that there was at that time no little amount of unfair dealing with the fish, especially in flood-time, when they are easily netted on the meadows, and in the spring, when the jack go into the ditches to spawn. Indeed, I will confess—let me hope that, notwithstanding the maxim, *nullum tempus occurrit regi*, a fault of so long ago will not be visited upon me—that I did a little poaching myself. I did it with trimmers; not the implement commonly called by that name, a kind of unattached float, with a live bait underneath, but with something nearly resembling a night-line. It was a little fork of wood, with some seven or eight yards of line attached, commonly baited with a gudgeon, and tied, just under water, to an overhanging bough. The method was not very destructive. One sweep of a net would kill more than I managed to secure during a whole summer, but it was amusing, and had just a spice of danger in it to give it excitement. The plan was to put down the trimmers overnight, and to take them up as early as could be managed next morning. The almost absolute solitude of the river in those days favoured the method. It will almost seem incredible when I say, that for the three months during which I spent the greater part, and sometimes the whole, of nearly every day upon the water, I never saw but one fishing-party, and that it was the rarest occurrence to encounter a pleasure-party of any kind. Still there was a certain fascinating risk about the business. One recollection still remains vividly by me, viz.,

that there is a curious resemblance in the stillness of the evening between the sound of a beast grazing and of a man's footstep. I have been startled more than once by a cow in this way. My chief prizes, thus illicitly secured, were a chub of about four pounds weight and a jack of about six. Chub, indeed, which will take a small fish more frequently than is commonly thought, were my best captures. The baits were often taken by eels, but the eels themselves but seldom secured. It was not easy to visit the trimmers early enough for these creatures. Left to themselves for any time, they twist the line so indefatigably that the fisherman finds nothing but a knot more than Gordian in its complexity.

The summer season of 1848 ended with one of the earliest floods ever known upon the Thames. One evening, somewhere in the later half of September, I found that the river had risen nearly half a foot in the course of two or three hours; and the journey home, with the current running fast and strong against me, was a laborious task. Two or three days of almost incessant rain followed; and then came a flood, as deep and as yellow as the winter commonly brings. The destruction of fish that ensued was pitiable. The broad ditches in which the fish took shelter from the force of the torrent were swept with nets, and yielded endless spoil. When the flood had abated, I started with my brothers to take the punt back to the place where it had been hired. We made it a three days' expedition, and found it most delightful, though not, if I remember right, very profitable in the way of sport. Indeed, there is never a time when a more distinct local knowledge is more necessary for the angler than when the river is bank full. The general features by which he is wont to judge are almost obliterated, and he has to work pretty nearly at random. The bank-fishers, indeed, have the best of it at such times. Indeed, I remember on that occasion an angler on the Oxfordshire shore near Pangbourne who had secured such a basket of perch as I never saw before or have seen since.

I trust that I have not wearied my readers with this gossip about times long past. The river is now, I believe, carefully preserved, and trimmering would be unpardonable even if it were possible, which, with a traffic so incessant, it can hardly be. My readers, I hope, will judge me harshly if, *consule Planco*, I was in this matter less law-abiding than they doubtless have always been.

PANGBOURNE AND MAPLEDURHAM

THE character of the river between Streatley and Pangbourne may be gathered from the fact that it flows for the whole distance, which is not less than four miles, without so much fall in any place as to compel the erection of a lock. Immediately above the latter village it opens out into what is, perhaps, the

finest reach of its upper course, the magnificent lake-like expanse of Henley of course excepted. The hills close in again upon the stream; a feature that adds here, as always, to its picturesque character. The slope on the Oxfordshire side is richly timbered; nor is its quietude broken, as is the case with the equally beautiful woodland on the opposite shore, by the invasion of the railway, which runs for several miles within hearing, though seldom happily within sight, of the river.

Pangbourne is a pretty village, somewhat spoilt, at least for the taste of those who knew it in the days of its simplicity, by the

fashion which has turned it into one of what may be called the outlying suburbs of London. It takes its name from a charming little stream which here flows into the Thames. The visitor who can throw a fly, and throw it well—for the highly educated inhabitants of these clear southern streams will take no clumsily offered lure—may, with permission first duly gained, fill a creel with trout from the Pang, pounders and even two-pounders among them. In any case he may profitably pursue its course for a few miles, say as far as Bradfield, seat of a school which has risen into reputation in these latter days. He will see a delightful country, whose rich meadows are so interspersed with woodlands, and have their hedgerows so finely timbered with oak (sometimes called, if I remember right, 'the Berkshire weed') that the whole has something of the aspect of a forest.

A noticeable feature of the river at Pangbourne is the pool, which exhibits the strength of the stream more effectively than is often the case, by the proximity of the various 'weirs' and 'bucks' over which and through which the river descends. The Thames loses something, no doubt, in picturesqueness by the system of locks, which maintains its efficiency as a navigable river, and its valley loses a great deal by the floods which are aggravated, if not caused, by these artificial restraints; but it gains, on the other hand, not a little. It gets that 'brimful' look which the severest drought scarcely seems to affect, and it can show these delightful weir-pools, with their cataracts, not more than four or five feet in depth, it is true, but effective from the great body of water which they pour ceaselessly down. If any one would enjoy the full experience of the delightsomeness of moving water, let him sojourn for a week in the thirsty region of the Chiltern Hills, where water is sometimes almost as rare as in the Sahara, and then come down to the river, which is indeed within easy reach, and spend a hot afternoon with his boat moored as close as may be to one of these 'Falls of the Thames.' An excellent view of the river may be got from the long white bridge which joins Pangbourne to Whitchurch, its neighbour on the Oxfordshire shore. If the tra-

veller is in luck he may see, at the right time of year, one of those mighty trout for which Pangbourne used to be, and I believe still is, especially famous.

Below Pangbourne the river valley opens out again, the meadows stretching in wide expanse, especially on the Berkshire shore. The river, too, which is curiously full of rushes and weed-beds, is, perhaps, less attractive than usual; but a walk of

two miles, or thereabouts, will bring him to what is, I venture to think, the most exquisite spot in its whole course, Mapledurham. Let him note on his way, first, on the Oxfordshire shore, Hardwick House, a picturesque building of some antiquity, the seat of the Powys family, and an admirable specimen of the manor-houses of Southern England; and, secondly, four or five hundred yards above Mapledurham Lock, a little wooded island. This I knew now more than forty years ago as the haunt of an otter, and it suggests a word of protest, useless I fear, as such words almost always are, against the barbarous Philistinism which is banishing, if it has not already banished, this beautiful creature

from the Thames. It is ruthlessly trapped and shot because the Angling Societies grudge it its tribute out of the multitude of coarse fish with which, though they are increasingly difficult to catch, the river still abounds. I should gladly see the passing of an Act which would give an absolute protection to what may be still left of the once abundant *fauna* of the Thames, the otter, first of all, and with him to the kingfisher, the grebe, and the moor-hen, now made the victims of useless massacre, 'butchered to make a Cockney's holiday.'

As I have come across the subject of what might be done by law to protect the beauties of the Thames, and make them as widely available as possible for the enjoyment of the public, I may take the opportunity of touching on one or two other points. For myself, and, I presume, others who knew and loved the river many years ago, the whole place is changed beyond all remedy. For in pleasure, as in business, 'all the markets overflow;' and thousands have found out the delights that were known to but a few here and there. We must satisfy ourselves with the pleasures of memory; and though *felices fuimus* is but a poor consolation as long as we retain the capacity of enjoyment, still it is something to feel, when fallen upon an iron age, that we have lived in the days of gold.

I have brought my imaginary traveller down the river without informing him whether he was to travel by land or by water. To row or be rowed is not always convenient or agreeable; and if the traveller wishes to make his journey continuous it is decidedly expensive, the hire of the boat together with the cost of sending it back to its starting-point amounting to a considerable sum. Still he will practically have no choice. There is, it is true, a towing-path; but it is not uniformly available for the purposes of the pedestrian. The Conservators of the river proclaim that it is intended for the purposes of navigation only; and that they will not be responsible if it is used for any other. They mean, I suppose, that they will not be answerable for damage, if the pedestrian slips into a hole and breaks his leg or is drowned. These dangers may be practically disregarded; but it is an insuperable obstacle that the path is not continuous, but changes from side to side (as here at Mapledurham, where it is transferred for a few hundred yards to the Oxfordshire shore), and that the foot-traveller will not always find it possible to get across. Sometimes, for instance, two neighbouring ferries are in the charge of one man. If the traveller is belated he may find no one in charge at all. Strictly speaking, I believe, the towing-path is not a public right-of-way. It would be well, perhaps, if it were made so by Act of Parliament, due compensation, of course, being made for any other rights that might be invaded or diminished in value by the enactment. Its use being thus legalised, it might also be made generally available by the establishment of regular ferries, duly served by competent men, at the points where it is transferred from one bank to the other. It would not, I fancy, be difficult to provide the necessary funds. The number of pedestrians would doubtless be greatly increased if they were sure of being able to continue their journey without interruption, while the expense might be diminished by continuing the regular service of ferrymen during the spring and summer months of the year only. As for the riparian proprietors, it is not the pedestrian that they have to dread, it is the camper-out, who invades their domain in boats

over which they have practically no control. The pedestrian cannot carry the *impedimenta* of the nightly bivouac; and it is this that, delightful as it may be to the excursionist party escaped from the trammels of civilisation, is a serious nuisance to the river-side resident.

As for camping-out, it might without difficulty be confined within legitimate bounds. Places might be set apart for the purpose, for which a proper fee should be charged. At the same time, the vexed question of private fishing-rights might be set at rest. Where they really exist they might be purchased at no great cost.

Mapledurham House is an admirable specimen, though it has not wholly escaped the destroying hand of the alterer and renovator, of the domestic architecture of the Tudor period. The warm red of its bricks, its gables, and mullioned windows, seen among the foliage deeply green with the perennial watering of the stream that almost washes its walls, are singularly effective. The Blunt family have the distinction of having possessed the estate, or at least a part of it, for nearly four centuries. The parish contains two manors, belonging curiously enough to two hundreds,, and Mapledurham Gurney was acquired by a Norman lord of that name at the Conquest, by the peaceful means of marriage with its heiress, and was sold in 1487 to a Blount. About a century after, the other manor—Mapledurham Chawsey—was added to the estate by Sir Michael Blount, for a sum, it is interesting to know, of 900*l.* The church is an interesting little building. The south aisle is the mortuary chapel of the reigning family. They adhere to the Roman Catholic faith, but they have the grace not to disfigure the building with the hideous wall of partition with which the Duke of Norfolk has marred the beautiful proportions of Arundel Church. The chapel contains some interesting monuments, one of them presenting the Shakespearian name of Bardolph. The Bardolphs were a knightly race, who owned the manor in the fourteenth century. The advowson of the church belonged, in early times, to the Abbess and Convent of Clare

Ruissal, near Gournay, in Normandy (the gift, evidently, of the Gurney who acquired the manor). When the alien priories were suppressed it came into the hands of the Crown. Henry VI. gave it to his new foundation of Eton, which still retains it. A more congenial retreat for the *magister emeritus* it would be difficult to imagine.

On the Berkshire side of the river, Purley (not the Purley, it should be said, where Horne Tooke pursued his philological 'Diversions') is noticeable for the beautiful variety of timber with which the park reaching down to the river—but, alas! cruelly bisected by the railway—is planted. Some of my pleasantest experiences of angling in days gone by are connected with the river at Mapledurham and the reaches below it, about half the way down to Reading. They belong to a time later by a few years than that of my Basildon recollections. But the state of things exists no longer, a fact which will give them, perhaps, an interest which they would not otherwise have. Between thirty and forty years ago one of my brothers and myself used to make our headquarters for a week or so in the late summer at the 'Roebuck,' a house which every frequenter of the Upper Thames will know. It is now a handsome hostelry, with spacious dining-saloons, a printed *menu*, a wine *carte* with some thirty vintages upon it at fashionable prices. The fact that one of the University crews made it their abode during a part of their preparation for the great race has given it an almost European celebrity. Nothing less can be said of a place which, for a time at least, furnished the papers with its quota of intelligence as regularly as did Paris or Egypt. In the days of which I speak it was nothing more than a roadside public-house, deriving a little extra custom from occasional visitors who made their way thither by water from Reading. I remember that when we first proposed to take up our abode there for a week the idea seemed to strike our hostess as a surprising novelty; and, indeed, the accommodation—the quaint bedroom, with its yellow-washed walls and low ceiling, and the narrow lattices, not too well

used to opening—was of the most primitive kind. The old building still stands unchanged by the side of its fashionable successor; and dusty drovers on their way to Reading market rest, as of old, under the elms before the door; but the river-side inn as I knew it in my youth is no more. I must confess that our sport was of the humblest kind, nothing more than the gudgeon-fishing for which I have already ventured, *pace* those who follow the lordly arts of salmon and trout-fishing, or fill their creels with pike and perch, to offer an apology. But for gudgeon-fishing it was a very paradise. Near to Mapledurham itself the stream ran too rapidly for the purpose; but in the neighbourhood of the 'Roebuck' there were spots that, as far as my experience goes, could not be rivalled elsewhere. In one place there would be fine sand, with some three or four feet of rather swift current over; in another a somewhat coarse gravel, with six or seven feet of slower water above, that was still more prolific. It was a delight which a summer day, aye, and a week of summer days, could not exhaust to move from one spot to another, and endeavour in the new locality to exceed the record of what had been achieved in the old. There was little question of size. The fish were curiously uniform in this respect, a peculiarity which is not uncommonly noticed by anglers in various branches of their sport. The commonest measure would be about four inches; a fish that reached to as much as six was almost a prodigy. But they made up in number what they wanted in magnitude. Our largest basket was *thirty-five dozen*, caught by two rods, without the help, it must be remembered, of a professional fisherman, an assistant who expedites the work of an angler not much less than a loader does that of a shooter. At one 'pitch,' to use the technical term, we caught, without moving, *eleven dozen and a half*. The total weight must have been somewhat about fifteen pounds for each angler, a basket which the trout-fisher in water not specially preserved would consider a more than respectable average. No great amount of skill was required for attaining this result. The mechanical faculty for moving and fixing a punt once acquired,

there was needed only the habitude of guessing aright where the fish might be found; and in those days it was hardly possible to go astray, so plentiful were the gudgeon, if only a place free from weeds was chosen. The cause of this extraordinary abundance of the gudgeon is worth noting, for this also—and here I cheerfully recognise a change for the better—has passed away. The keeper of the lock at Mapledurham, Shepherd by name, was the most inveterate destroyer of fish that the Thames has ever known. He rented the right of netting from the neighbouring proprietors, and 'skinned' the river, to use the expressive term which is applied in such cases, relentlessly. There was no one in those days to inquire into the size of the mesh,* and with his bag nets and flue nets, and other diabolical contrivances of misplaced ingenuity, he cleared the river of everything that was much above the size of a sprat.† The gudgeon thus freed from their natural enemies increased and multiplied marvellously. To catch a jack, perch, or even a roach, within the range of the fellow's operations, was almost impossible, but the gudgeon-fishing became incomparably good. What it is now I do not know, and shall not risk a certain disappointment by trying to find out.

---

* I believe that when this was inquired into at a late time, all, or almost all the nets in common use, were found to have a mesh illegally small.

† He would sometimes send as much as half-a-ton of fish at one time to Leadenhall Market.

85567

HENLEY-ON-THAMES

I MUST pass rapidly over the twelve miles of river which lie between the 'Roebuck' and Henley, my next and last resting-place for the present. Caversham, which may be called the 'port' of the prosperous town of Reading, itself bisected by the Kennet, I shall always remember with affection, for it was here that I first made acquaintance with Thames angling, and, indeed, I may say, with angling altogether. I have a remembrance of seeing fish caught by my brothers in what was then a canal, but is now, alas! a dusty railway, running through Sydenham,* but it was in a ditch, running into the Thames at Caversham, that I made the first capture of my own rod. It was, I think, a stickleback; but, city born and bred as I was, I did not know its name, and thought it a small perch—a fish which had, I knew, spikes of its own. I remember thinking myself very generous when I told a wandering angler—a tall Irishman, he was—of the place where I had been, as I thought, so successful, and being not a little disappointed at his disgust when he found out what my 'small perch' really were. My

* Sydenham was then (fifty years ago) a country village, to which Londoners often made their annual summer migration. My readers will realise of how different a state of things I am speaking when I say that a pic-nic in Penge Wood was one of the regular pleasures of the place. But then, still more surprising, Kentish Town was a rural retreat. I remember my father taking a house there for the summer.

experience, however, soon widened, and being as diligent and persevering a young angler as ever fished, I had some real successes. That which remains most vividly impressed on my memory is a capture of some fine perch from the island, then called 'Lyford's Island,'* below Caversham.

Three miles farther down the river comes the charming village of Sonning. It would be monstrous to pass by without a word of mention one of the most delightful spots on the Thames, but my own acquaintance with it and its angling resources—still, I understand, in high repute—happens to be of the very slightest. About a mile below Sonning, on the right-hand bank of the river, the traveller will see what looks like a tributary of the Thames, spanned by a somewhat long bridge. I remember making an expedition to this place from Henley under the impression that it was the Loddon. When we reached it we found that, contrary to the usual habit of tributaries, the water was flowing out, not in; we pursued our exploration, and after navigating for two or three miles a somewhat difficult channel, found ourselves at last in the real Loddon, and then, by still descending, in the Thames again. A frugally minded traveller may thus avoid the toll which is payable at Shiplake Lock; but I must warn him, that, unless he values his time over cheaply, the diversion will cost him more than the threepence to which the Thames Conservators have reduced their charge. The real mouth of the Loddon is just below the lock. Pope is pleased to call it 'the Loddon slow,' but it may be guessed that he never tried to row a boat or push a punt against its current. I have done both, and have always thought the epithet inappropriate. Probably the poet refers to some higher reaches of the stream, perhaps to the part near Swallowfield, where Miss Mitford describes it as the 'brimming Loddon water.' It is a bright, rapid stream, as far as I have been able to make acquaintance with it, fairly well stocked with fish, though

* Lyford was good-tempered and obliging, but, I fear, a somewhat ill-conducted publican, who kept the inn by the bridge.

I have never had in it such success as that which, according to one of my cherished family traditions, fell to the lot of my grandfather when he caught a perch of six pounds weight, a fish in its degree as noble as the turbot on whose destinies Domitian consulted the Conscript Fathers of Rome. The Loddon of course adds the attraction of change to the fishing of the Henley district; but it has also its drawbacks. It floods more rapidly than the Thames, which, indeed, is very slow to rise, and sometimes spoils, for angling purposes, the colour of all the river below its mouth with its muddy tribute.*

It is this Henley district that is the most familiar to me of all the country of the Thames. I made my first acquaintance with it when I was a boy of fifteen, came to love it in many subsequent visits and sojourns, and came back to it, as, I hoped, to a permanent home, five-and-twenty years afterwards, when I was appointed Head-master of the Henley Grammar School. '*Dis aliter visum,*' and I never felt more inclined to murmur against the irony of Fate when it granted me my wish for a brief season, and then took it away. '*Ostendit tantum . . . . neque ultra* ——'

But I will go back for a few minutes to the river above Henley. Somewhat less than a mile above Marsh Lock the traveller will see on the Oxfordshire bank a particularly comfortable-looking house, with brilliant parterres of flowers in front, and an archery lawn. Bolney Court, for this is the name of the place (Oxfordshire houses at least, in the neighbourhood of Henley, are commonly 'courts'), when I first knew it was a ruin, standing in the midst of a desolate wilderness, and had the reputation of being haunted. But the river, which is here divided into many streams by islands,† was a glorious place for fishing. Perch and chub

* I ought, perhaps, to say '*was* very slow to rise.' Modern drainage improvements have had the almost disastrous effect of throwing the whole rainfall into the river in the course of a very few hours.

† The traveller should note a massive oak stump at the upper end of the topmost of these. It points to a very remote past, for it would not be possible now, I think, to find an oak on a Thames island.

and roach, such as do not often bless the eyes of anglers in these later days, used to haunt the pools and eddies. My friends at Bolney tell me that the river is now singularly bare of life. The short reach below Bolney is, for its length, one of the finest on the Thames. On the right bank, Park Place, built by Marshal Conway, who was Minister of War in the early days of George III., and beautified, or, to speak more correctly, metamorphosed in later days, stands upon the height of a wooded ridge, which, after a steep descent, terminates in a chalk cliff; on the left a rich level pasture is bounded by the oaks and chestnuts of Bolney. The river is broad and deep, giving the traveller, as he lets himself drift down its scarcely perceptible current, more than one delicious woodland view. A little bridge that spans the mill-stream on the Oxfordshire shore calls to my mind one of the angling successes of long past days. My brother and I moored our boat, which we had no means of fastening with poles, to the piles of the bridge, not so much because we fancied the place as because it lent itself to our necessities. But we had a grand evening's sport, catching, I think, not only a large weight of fish, but a specimen of every kind that swims in the Thames, excepting the trout only, and those rare denizens, the tench and bream. The water was deep, and the 'swim,' at least while the mill was working, of just the right quickness. Probably it had never been tried before; we never found it so prolific again. I fancy that we not unfrequently owed our success to the very fact that in those days we had to anchor ourselves where we could. No professional fisherman would have condescended to fasten his punt to such a place.

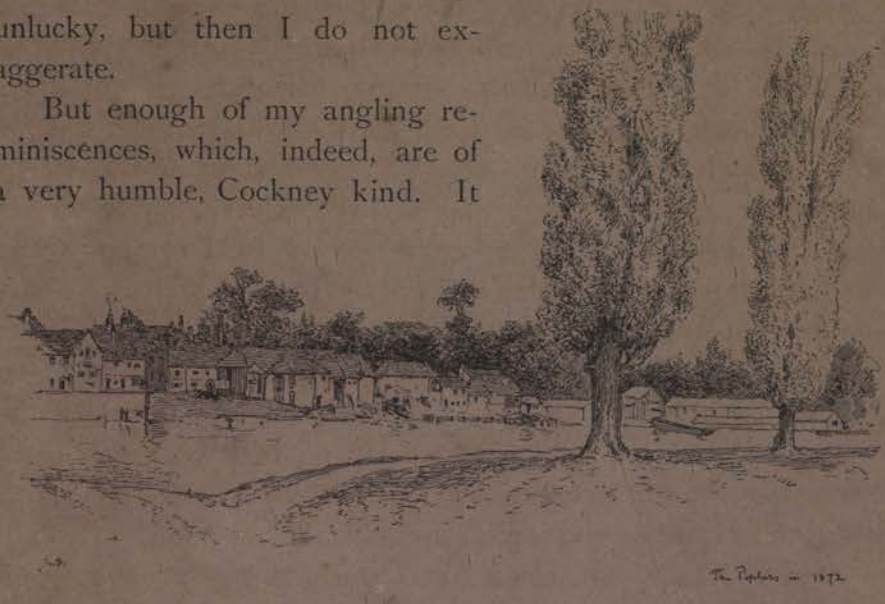
The river below Marsh Lock used to abound with fish; when I last tried it—ten years ago, I think—it seemed to have sadly fallen off. But my most vivid recollection of it is an unhappy one. For here I suffered the only injury which I have never been able to forgive. We were trolling for pike under the care of a professional fisherman. Trolling, as practised by a novice, is an employment full of false alarms—I should rather say, false hopes. The bait catches over and over again in a weed or bulrush; the

young, sometimes the veteran, angler, thinks that a fish has seized it, gives out line, which the stream is strong enough to carry down, and after waiting five or ten minutes, during which the imaginary fish is supposed to be swallowing his prey, draws in his line to find nothing at the end of it. I suppose that we boys had worn out our young fisherman's patience with these fancies, and when I announced another 'run' he peremptorily told me that it was nothing but a weed, and bade me pull in and clear the line. I obeyed; but after a few seconds he shouted, 'Drop the top of your rod, Sir; it is a fish.' It was a fish, indeed, and such a fish as I never saw before or have seen since—a perch of size as it seemed to me through the (perhaps, magnifying) medium of the water, simply stupendous. I caught a glimpse of its deep, darkly-striped side—a glimpse, but alas! no more, for the next instant it was gone. A bitterer disappointment I have never felt; and, as I said, I have never been able to forgive the impatience or want of faith which caused it. But for them I might have 'beaten,' to use the slang of the day, 'the record' of my grandfather, perhaps surpassed the mythic perch of nine pounds which is said to have been caught in the water of the Serpentine. As it is the Thames has never yielded me a finer perch than an insignificant two-pounder.

Henley Reach, to pursue and conclude my angling reminiscences, I have seldom found productive. Its chief fault is that the current is dull. Still I have recollections of a few successful days; of one notably, my last before bidding a final farewell to my Henley home, when, under William Parrott's care, I caught almost a hundred perch off the mouth of two wide ditches on the Buckinghamshire shore (Oxfordshire has by this time given place to Buckinghamshire), close to Regatta Island; another when I made trial, after an interval of five-and-twenty years, of a 'pitch' a little below Remenham, on the Berkshire shore, showed me by William Stone. It was a calm November afternoon, with the river just enough swollen by rain to make the current move a little more quickly than common. I filled the punt-well with roach, among them the biggest that I ever caught

in the Thames. Anglers, who read of the doings of their fellows in the Thames and elsewhere, will read with surprise that this fish weighed only *half-an-ounce more than a pound.* I have seen finer roach by far, notably some which I used to watch with envy as they were drawn from the Arun* by a half-blind old fisherman some forty years ago; but during an experience of many years I never caught, or saw caught, one larger than that I have just described. Doubtless I have been unlucky, but then I do not exaggerate.

But enough of my angling reminiscences, which, indeed, are of a very humble, Cockney kind. It



is not for its fishing, but for its Regatta, that Henley has become one of the best-known places in England. The various localities in the great reach, which stretches in an almost due northerly direction for a mile and a quarter from Henley Bridge to Regatta Island, are almost better known than the 'Gut' and the 'Long Bridge,' and the 'Barges' at Oxford. 'Remenham Church' and the 'Point,' which is not, I gladly learn, to be cut off, and the poplars,† now, alas! represented by one solitary

* At the Black Rabbit Inn, two miles above Arundel. The inn stands, but the roach, which varied from one pound to two pounds in weight, are no more.

† These Lombardy poplars were, I believe, the first trees of their kind ever planted in England. Marshal Conway is said to have brought them over early in the second half of the last century.

wreck, have long been and are now household words to English oarsmen, and of late years, indeed, to Irish, French, German, and American competitors.

The Regatta does not date back further than 1839. But its real origin may, perhaps, be assigned to a time ten years earlier. Anyhow, no race (the 'seven-oar,' hereafter to be spoken of, only excepted) ever rowed on the Henley water will be so famous as the first Inter-University match, rowed on June 10th, 1829

(When I say 'the Henley water' I am scarcely exact; as a matter of fact, the boats started from Hambleden Lock, about a mile below Regatta Island.*) This race was what the victory of Corœbus the Elean was to the Olympic games, a kind of landmark in athletic history. The heroes that took part in it deserve a brief record; and, indeed, they were notable men. Of the Oxford crew

* Racing was then in a very undeveloped condition. At Oxford the boats were crowded together in Iffley Lock, got out as fast as they could, the stroke running down the thwarts, passing the boat as he went along the side of the lock, and finally dropping into his seat. To catch the boat in front, or, at least, to escape the boat behind, was the object of ambition.

one became a Bishop, another a Dean, and the coxswain also reached the latter dignity. Another still enjoys the distinction of having been the heaviest man that ever rowed in an University contest. Mr. Toogood, still I am glad to say alive, weighed fourteen stone and a half. The Cambridge crew also numbered among them a future Bishop (and what a bishop!—Selwyn, the Evangelist of New Zealand) and a Dean, eminent also among Deans in their appropriate excellence of learning.* The race was won by Oxford by six lengths, having been rowed (the accurate record of the stop-watch had not then been invented) in 14 minutes 10 seconds. If this time be correct, the modern improvements of outrigged boats, broad-bladed oars, and sliding seats, have not done so much to increase speed as might have been expected. Proportionally reduced it gives about eight minutes and a half for the present Henley course, though an allowance ought to be made for the exertion of rowing the longer distance. Seven minutes and a half is about as good a 'record' as has since been achieved.

The festival of 1839 had but very modest proportions. There were but *two* prizes to be rowed for, the Grand Challenge Cup and the Town Cup. Oxford sent five out of the six competitors, but the sixth (Trinity College, Cambridge) was successful, winning the last heat against the Oxford Etonians. In the crew of the latter boat I find the name of Stafford H. Northcote, now Lord Iddesleigh, as rowing No. 2; in the former that of John Gylby Lonsdale, Canon and Chancellor of Lichfield. The Town Cup was won by the *Wave*, a native boat, steered by a friend whose many kindnesses I am glad here to acknowledge—Mr. John Cooper, present Town-clerk of Henley. One bad precedent, which seldom has been departed from before the last two or three summers brought with them a happier period, was established by the Regatta of 1839. We are told that 'it rained in torrents,' but that it 'cleared slightly before three.' Since then it has generally rained in torrents, but not always cleared 'towards three,' or

* Charles Merivale of St. John's, now Dean of Ely.

indeed towards any time. It is noticeable that the umpire rode by the side of the competitors. A notice preserved in the *Album* of the Regattas proclaims that no one is to ride along the tow-path except the umpire, 'who,' it apologetically adds, 'must necessarily ride by the side of the boats during the race.'

The following year enlarged the circle of competitors for the Grand Challenge. Two London clubs, the Leander, and King's College then newly founded, and doubtless doing its best to follow in the ways of the older Universities, sent boats; and the former won the cup from the holders. In the beaten crew occurs for the first time a name famous in boating annals, the Hon. G. Denman, now Mr. Justice Denman. The 'times' of the races are not always given; but one trial heat is timed at 10½ minutes, another at 9¾. If these are correct, the very quick record of 1829 (which, by the way, is given by some authorities at the impossible figure of 11 minutes) becomes doubtful. In 1841, however, we hear of the course being 'rowed over' in 9 minutes, and of a race being accomplished in 8.30. We can only say, that till we reach the historical period and the days of the stop-watch times are very uncertain and perplexing. The Regatta at this time had almost suffered what might have been a fatal blow. Rowing was then little better than prize-fighting in the eyes of the 'dons.' They have since been educated into something more than tolerance for it. The newspapers of the time inform us that 'apprehensions were entertained that all Oxford crews would be forbidden to row by the authorities.' The objection was obviated by a device very characteristic of the University discipline of those days—*the boats were not to row under their college names.* Wadham accordingly took the title of the 'John Cross,' the Westminster of the 'Queen Elizabeth,' and Brasenose of 'The Childe of Hall' club. The Thames Commissioners (predecessors of the more modern Conservancy), by a salutary act of despotism, closed the locks above and below, that no barge might pass through.

In 1841 took place what was practically a University race, an Oxford crew contending with and being beaten by the 'Cambridge

Henley Regatta
R.S.

Subscription Rooms.' The latter crew was stroked by W. Balliol Brett, now Lord Justice Brett. Another famous boating name appears for the first time this year, that of 'Tom Egan,' the greatest of coxswains and coaches.

The following year saw the addition of a four-oar race, the cup being given by the stewards of the Regatta. But whatever change took place, the weather remained unchangeably bad. This year we find the umpire declaring to the competitors that he would not be answerable for their safety if they persisted in rowing in such a gale of wind. As the boats were very different from the unstable craft of the present day, the gale must have been considerable.

The next year was the year of the 'seven-oar' of deathless fame. It was not strictly an University race, Cambridge having been represented not by the University Club but by the Subscription Room, but by common consent it has always been reckoned as such. The story must be briefly told, for no record of the Regatta would be complete without it. The stroke of the Oxford crew, F. N. Menzies, of University College, who had for some days been suffering from feeble health, fainted away as he took his place in the boat. The race was postponed for a short time, in the hope that he might recover. But the doctors forbade his attempting to row in any case. The Oxonians now proposed to put in a substitute for the missing man. Their opponents objected. They then declared their intention of rowing with seven oars, and shifting 'No 7' to stroke's place and 'bow' to 'No. 7's,' left the bow thwart unoccupied. The Cantabs now appealed to the stewards whether they ought to be compelled to row against a crew of seven, and the stewards, with a finer feeling, one is inclined to think, for sentiment than for justice, decided against them. They then offered to allow the substitute whom they had before refused. Oxford in their turn declined. It seems now that the obvious course for Cambridge would have been to land one of their own men; but this, though proposed and canvassed, was not followed, and the race was rowed. Oxford had lost the toss and had to take the Bucks side.

It seems to be now generally agreed that this is the worse course; so much the worse, that if the crews are anything like equal the crew on the Berks side is sure to win. Good judges in those days do not seem to have been so certain. On this particular day the wind was blowing freshly from the Bucks shore. Under ordinary circumstances this would have compelled the coxswain to put the rudder against the bow-side, who have always from their position, supposing them to be otherwise equal, a tendency to 'pull round'

the 'stroke-side' oars. Anyhow, whatever the cause, it soon became evident that Oxford would hold its own. 'Off Fawley Court they began to lead, and drew away steadily. Below Poplar Point they were clear, and, taking their opponent's water, went in winners by nearly a length's daylight, amidst such an uproar,' adds the chronicler, 'as has probably never been heard at Henley.' The distance was accomplished, we are told, in nine minutes, being fourteen seconds more than they had occupied in one of the trial heats, a heat which they had won by six lengths.

The next year saw the addition of a new prize, the 'Diamond Sculls,' for which there were eleven entries. Other additions were

made from time to time which it would be tedious to follow in detail. A pair-oar race instituted in 1846 brought, among other competitors to be more or less distinguished in after years, the present Dean of Ripon. It was won by Messrs. Milman and Haggard, both historic names in the annals of rowing. So the Regatta grew till it positively became unwieldy from its magnitude, and some of its 'events' had to be retrenched; among them the 'Public School Cup,' instituted in 1877 and abolished this year, after bringing into the field some passable but not a few indifferent crews. It is a fact, however, that in 1850 the festival seemed in no small danger of extinction. It had then dwindled down to dimensions so small that all the races could be compressed into the space of a single afternoon. Other riverside towns, as Maidenhead and Marlow, began to find that regattas, with their crowds of visitors, might be very profitable things, and the competition had a bad effect. Anyhow, in this year there was a 'row over' for the Grand Challenge Cup and for two other of the chief prizes. The only interesting race appears to have been one between a Christchurch and a Lincoln four; the former won, reversing the decision of a race rowed two or three days before at Maidenhead. This crisis passed, the Regatta, though till within the last two years persistently persecuted by the weather, has continued to prosper. Its fame has attracted competitors from far away. Trinity College, Dublin, competed for several years in succession; twice a German eight has appeared in the lists. German and French scullers have frequently rowed. There have been three American crews, whose qualification as amateurs seems, however, to have been more than doubtful. This year (1885) a Canadian crew competed, and with a miraculously quick stroke, something like fifty to the minute, sought to 'cut down' their English opponents. But no foreigner or colonist has yet succeeded in winning a prize.

At present the gathering is only too monstrously large. This year more than a hundred house-boats and nearly fifteen hundred rowing-boats of all sorts and sizes were counted on the reach;

which, indeed, became *constratum classibus æquor*, the boats being so thick that it would be almost possible to cross the river by stepping from one to another. It is almost to be feared, that as a

ball-room is sometimes so crowded that dancing is impossible the rowing-boats may be elbowed out by the crowds that have come to see them. As it is, they are seriously inconvenienced by the unmanageable craft which get in their way, sometimes at a most critical time. At Henley, as at other places on the Thames, one remembers and regrets the quietude of earlier times. It is not, however, always Regatta-time at Henley; for the most part the town has altered but very little. The view from the Bridge is still one of the loveliest to be found in England. There have been some changes for the worse. The river, though still passably clear, is very different from the almost crystal stream which I remember it to have been some forty years ago. The poplars, as

I have said, have almost wholly disappeared, and the beautiful clump of trees on Regatta Island, which makes the middle distance of the picture, the background being the wooded ridge of Hambleden, has suffered terribly from the wind. On the other hand, Chalk Hill, which rises on the spectator's right hand as he looks down the reach, from being a bare and almost unsightly down, as I remember it, has become beautifully clothed with wood. At Henley, as elsewhere, change has its compensations. For myself, I look back so fondly to the old that I scarcely care to see the new. But it would be ungracious to grudge if a hundred now for one in times that are past enjoy the manifold beauties of Isis and Thamesis.

00085567

Digitized with financial assistance from

Hermès India

a project facilitated by the Rotary Club of Bombay

on 10 August, 2018